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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the effects of social ideology on academic freedom, beginning with the role of academic freedom, on teaching and research, as well as the professional responsibilities that go along with this freedom. The paper goes on to examine the conflicts faced by academic institutions in balancing academic freedom with the influence of outside factors, such as corporate or political support. It discusses the role of tenure in supporting academic freedom, as well as alternatives to tenure, along with concerns about tenure and academic freedom at Boston University under the leadership John Silber. The paper then discusses why many professors have chosen to eliminate lessons or entire courses due to concerns over political correctness and controversial topics. (MDM)

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Running head: THE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL IDEOLOGY

The Effects of Social Ideology on Academic Freedom

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Society determines the degree to which schools can exercise methods designed for the pursuit of intellectual integrity. As the beliefs, values, and social objectives of a society change, schools must modify their standards to attain social status quo (Tozer, Violas, & Senese, 1995). This phenomenon of society prompting school reform is detrimental to the progressive education of future generations. For school to be truly effective as an elixir of social and political problems, it should function independently of external influences. Effective school reform develops from within the confines and scope of the school itself, and is not a result of social demands.

Even in those schools and universities that are able to conduct themselves under little or no pressure from the outside, educators are rarely free to perform under absolute freedom from the opinions and the demands of others. Individuals governing the institution enforce ideals and objectives which originate outside of academia, regardless of the educational responsibilities of the university. At the same time, educators are at risk of offending their students if controversial, yet progressive topics are discussed. These pressures from both university elitists and students leave educators looking over both shoulders while performing lessons in the classroom.

Previous consideration for both contemporary social standards and confrontational authorities limited the scope of research for many scholars. Academic freedom was originated to enable educators to research personally attractive avenues of thought without fear of retaliation by an opposing party. Their results are intended to enlighten the academic community to ideas which were not previously considered. Ultimately, academic freedom creates an unrestricted forum for research that opens multiple doors in the interpretation and analysis of contemporary queries (Tierney, 1993). This effort to discover the truth about our behavioral and physical worlds has been subject to change by forces outside academia. The scope of academic freedom allows for the pursuit of ideas that some members of society may consider inappropriate or offensive. As social beliefs and values change over time, so does the definition and scope of academic freedom. This

form of academic freedom is diluted by the infiltration of contemporary social ideology into academia, limiting the availability of accurate and usable knowledge.

The concept of academic freedom is unique in that it allows educators to conduct themselves in ways which those outside of academia are restricted by law. Exceptions to social norms and standards are made for research efforts if the researcher can justify the methodology and prove its worth to the progression of humanity. Laboratory experiments utilize primates, rodents, and other animals to assess the effects of substances to the human body, including cosmetics and illegal drugs. The possession of illegal or federally regulated substances (including those drugs used in the aforementioned experiment) is another example of such exceptions. While there are notable exceptions to this rule, these activities are acceptable for qualified experts and scholars, but they carry legal penalties for those outside of the academic spectrum. They are entrusted to those individuals possessing the qualifications and competency to manage them in an appropriate fashion.

Permitting exemption from law for research purposes is a strategy designed to perpetuate the progress of humanity. Regulating or prohibiting substances and actions serves to decrease their negative effects on people and their surroundings. It does not allow for the further understanding of the substances or actions and the possibility for more appropriate management procedures. Exceptions are made for those people who demonstrate both the knowledge and capacity to manage these substances and actions appropriately and responsibly.

Academic freedom provides educators and researchers with unique sovereignty that is not accessible to others. These freedoms are accompanied by a series of professional responsibilties. Swinnerton-Dyer (1995) labels these responsibilities as academic duties, and they are intended to maintain the integrity of the educator and to ensure that an appropriate level of responsibility to the pupil is preserved. The educator must remain contemporary within his or her field of instruction. The teaching of outdated content is detrimental to progressive education. The academic has the responsibility of

making public the true findings of his or her research, as well as the results of other's research. A balanced, full representation of the existing viewpoints is apropos. Also, lectures should be interesting, coherent, and in the best interests of the attending students (Swinnerton-Dyer, 1995).

Academic freedom works to provide educators with the ability to research subject areas utilizing the most effective means possible, regardless of any existing social inappropriateness or controversy. While this includes numerous exemptions from public law and belief, it also entails a high level of professional responsibility. Academic freedom also extends privileges to students, as well. They are allowed to attend the institution of their choice and select the course of study they are most interested in. They may attend lectures or abstain from them if they wish. They also have the opportunity to live where and how they choose, managing their space and time as they see fit. They may question the relevancy of an instructors prepared material and act against statement and beliefs the instructor may enforce in class. While these freedoms are not nearly as extensive as those offered to educators, they do provide opportunities for pursuing an education which suits each student's unique desires and aspirations.

Lastly, academic freedom applies to institutions. It reserves the rights to decide which subjects to teach and how to teach them, which students to enroll and how it shall be staffed. To a limited extent, it may decide how its income shall be spent (Swinnerton-Dyer, 1995). This writer suggests that the degree to which a university may act completely under academic freedom determines the degree to which its faculty and students may exercise academic freedom. Limits imposed on the university often trickle down to the educators and the students.

These fundamental aspects of academic freedom allow for academia to operate as an opportunistic institution, maximizing access to the ideas, methodologies, and capital available in its society. Scholars are free to conduct experiments, present results, and draw conclusions without constant concern for their compatibility with the status quo. This

allows for the reform of social ideology and political economy based on equitable research and examination. Ultimately, academic freedom is a mechanism with which schools may induce social reform, if it is allowed to operate the way it was originally designed. It is currently subject to political and ideological pressures to the extent that many educators are reluctant to exercise their freedom. A balanced degree of management should be employed to regulate the scope of academic freedom and maintain the soundness of the society, yet this has become the rule, not the exception. Society's ability to reform school is undermining academic freedom's abilities to reform society.

This social regulation appears in a number of forms and it attacks a campus in both direct and indirect ways. Schools and universities are often pressured to assume current social values which are not always effective or just within the context of education. Affirmative action is a social mechanism designed to achieve equality between races and genders and to increase opportunities for all. It has been adopted by many schools and is apparent both in the acceptance of students and the hiring of faculty. While diversity is desired on a campus, the diversity of race and gender cannot become an analogy for diversity of ideas and beliefs. Though student and faculty populations may become increasingly heterogeneous, they also risk academic integrity and competitive success, as the potential for admission to a university now begins to shift from meritocracy to racial or gender status. Institutions in search of a student or professor may be forced to pass up the brightest candidate for the job to meet the requirements of a social standard. Thus, the encroaching pressure of ideology born outside academia has narrowed the scope of academic freedom (Balch & Warren, 1996).

Both public and private universities are often dependent to some degree on donations from corporate, individual, and political entities. The willingness of these entities to donate is often dependent on the product of the university. If a faculty member publishes an article which is inconsistent with, or opposes the actions or beliefs of a potential donor, then the potential donor is less likely to donate funds and materials to the

school. Administrators, in their efforts to collect such offerings, have restricted the work of their faculty so as not to jeopardize their financial well being. A university's dependency on donations from outside institutions is detrimental to academic freedom.

The ability of an administration to dictate the direction of its faculty has led to controversy within a number of schools and university. Hillsdale College has acquired a reputation for upholding freedom in education, and for that reason Hillsdale has collected a number of financial supporters. The administration intends to keep things this way, yet is being accused of violating their faculty's privileges under academic freedom. Educators at Hillsdale claim that their president has fired tenured professors and has expelled students for questioning the actions of the collage. They state that the collage's efforts to earn money and maintain their image has taken priority over their responsibilities to faculty and students (Nicklin, 1996).

Concern over administrative pressure and job security at academic institutions has existed since the conception of academic freedom. A social institution which attempts to operate independently of other social standards is subject to internal conflict due to outside pressures. One of the most effective measures designed to guarantee protection for educators operating under academic freedom is the status of tenure. While tenure serves to enforce job security, its roots lie in the tendency for political and economic influence upon educational efforts. Its primary and original purpose is to protect open-minded and honest pursuits of truth in education (Yarmolinsky, 1996).

When tenure is granted to an educator, it ensures that he or she cannot be dismissed from an institution for reasons involving the nature or impact of the research they may conduct. In this way, special interests cannot influence research or curriculum unless an irresponsible academic allows for it. Also, the academic cannot be dismissed for refusing to oblige special interests and are free to pursue knowledge without condemnation. Tenure has been increasingly defined as a form of job security rather than an avenue for research. At the same time, the amount of research expected of scholars has

decreased. For many people outside of academia, tenure represents a privilege offered in no other profession and serves no apparent function other than unjustified job security. A movement has been developed to abolish tenure in the interests of vocational equality and to raise levels of competitiveness among teachers. The success of this movement would surely dissolve academic freedom.

There are valid arguments against of tenure. For some educators, tenure is an opportunity to relax their efforts in the classroom and it often dilutes a teachers enthusiasm for learning and instructing. High school teachers are eligible for tenure, yet they are required to conduct little or no research efforts. If accuracy in research is no longer the reason for the establishment of tenure, we need to identify its replacement and determine whether or not we can justify tenure for high school teachers under this new rationalism.

Many schools and universities are not supportive of tenure. Guaranteeing employment of an individual for thirty or more years includes incremental raises in salary and benefits, aside from the inability to dictate the academic conduct of the employee. The position of the adjunct professor has created a loophole through which administrators can limit the amount of tenured professors on their faculty. An adjunct professor may be hired to teach one or two classes, yet never achieve full-time status and therefore never be eligible for tenure. Along with adjuncts are those academics who teach for short periods at universities for research purposes and then move on to greener pastures and other research interests (Yarmolinsky, 1996). Universities have increased their employment of temporary instructors despite possible inadequacies in their technique or expertise.

Other institutions utilize a more direct approach to prevent tenure. An example of such an approach is unfolding at Boston University. A number of academics have complained of unjust rulings handed down by the administration because the faculty's behavior was not compatible with school policy. Reported incidents include denial of tenure, delayed bonuses, and the dissection of dissertations. The culminating complaint of

the faculty is that decision making processes at Boston University are performed behind closed doors and are directed by the interests of the administrative figureheads. Each side in the conflict has made public reports of their positions. Administration remains unappologetic and insists that their goals are in the interests of higher education and approaching truth in knowledge (Leatherman, 1996).

A recent criticism of the administration issued by the Faculty Council is the process of appointing administrative officials at Boston University. In the spring of 1996, president Silber will relinquish his presidency and become chancellor of the university. Though it has been labeled as a Task Force on Continuity in search of the most appropriate candidate, accusations abound that the process to elect a replacement for president Silber is an exclusively internal process with considerations based solely upon the immediate interests of the administrative body. Mr. Silber has long been a controversial president at Boston University, often being referred to as intimidating, intolerant, and a tyrant.

His task force elected Jon Westling, former provost and assistant to Mr. Silber. The Faculty Council insists that the election process denied the input of all those at the university, yet outside of the administration. All of the four candidates reviewed for the position were administrators at Boston University. Mr. Silber has stated that he will assist Mr. Westling in faculty and tenure decisions. Thus, the university has maintained its policies toward faculty by turning inward and denying any opportunity for change (Leatherman, 1996). Many schools and universities are willing to utilize whatever strategy is necessary to achieve their political and financial objectives, despite infringing on the rights provided by academic freedom. This most often results in conflict between administration and faculty. For a professor to exercise academic freedom, he or she must pay close attention to the behavior of the governing administration.

The manner in which students are presented with course material is another, equally serious concern. A student is endowed with the rights to confront an educator if he or she believes that immoral or demeaning material is being presented in class. Student

allegations of racism and sexism have led professors to limit or eliminate topics of such controversy so as to protect their own integrity and reputation. As classroom populations become increasingly diverse in regard to student age, ethnicity, and, most recently, disabilities, the number of viewpoints increases proportionately. Clearly, the words which a teacher speaks in the classroom carries with them the risk of controversy involving students, teachers, and the administration. The grounds on which such allegations may be filed by students are broad and consequential.

Many professors choose to eliminate lessons or entire courses of social and historical value which include instances of discrimination, racism, and sexism. As a result, most courses regurgitate politically correct information and discourage any critical discussion of controversial topics. Thus, curriculums become stagnant and uninteresting rather than insightful and stimulating (Finn, 1989). This writer insists that students must be instilled with the understanding that educational processes are most effective when they incorporate controversy. Discussion of such issues are intended to provoke intense discussion, yet are not intended to be offensive. They offer true education in the form of enlightenment. Under academic freedom, it is the student's responsibility to allow opposing perspectives to challenge their own and, if appropriate, reconsider their perspective if a more appropriate view is agreed upon.

If academic freedom was truly a mechanism which operated independently from outside influences, as it was originally intended, education would benefit society in more effective and diverse ways. Today it is riddled with trendy, status quo values and beliefs which are products of other, remote circumstances. This has rendered academic freedom nearly ineffective, and has left its greatest defense, tenure, without sound justification for its implementation. This is another example of how school reform originating from political, economic, and social objectives restricts the democratic process of effective education of the population.

At the same time, the fundamental scope of academic freedom presents unique situations which do require some degree of management. The inhumane treatment of animals in the laboratory is a current concern. Controversy was ignited at the Institute of Environmental Medicine over the deaths of three squirrel monkeys which were injected with crack cocaine. All three monkeys died during the experiment. Moor-Jankowski, an associate of the scientist who conducted the experiment, suspected foul play and reported the incident. He was correct and charges were filed.

Ironically, Moor-Jankowski's non-tenured professorship was terminated shortly thereafter. New York University claimed that they were no longer able to afford Moor-Jankowski's salary, yet others challenge this rationale. These circumstances are representative of how non-academic interests affect academic freedom. Animals were abused in the laboratory and a responsible scholar reported the incidence. As a result, the scholar was terminated, presumably on the grounds that the special interests of the university were jeopardized (Walker, 1996).

It is observed that school reform is caused by changing social values and ideologies. This subjects the focus of academic freedom to constant redefinition. This writer has argued that for academic freedom to reach its full potential it must be an entity separate from outside influences, specifically those objectives originating from social, economic, and political influences. This is truly a noble goal which should compel both contemporary educators and legislative officials. Attaining this goal will bring cohesiveness to relationships between administrators, educators, and students, and will maximize a school's potential in the society it was designed to serve.

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